

As much as I love the United States, we could learn a lot from other countries like Finland and Estonia. In Finland, tuition at universities is free, new mothers are given “baby boxes” which has drastically reduced infant mortality, and both mothers and fathers get one year of paid maternity leave. Teaching is considered an esteemed profession there. I visited THL, which is the Finnish equivalent of the Center for Disease Control Agency. Estonia is a very technologically advanced society, and is where Skype originated from. I visited e-Estonia and learned about their e-society, which means that they do voting, banking, taxes, healthcare, and more all online. It would make doctors’ lives easier if the U.S. had a way to have everyone’s health records in one place like Estonia does. In Estonia, I also toured the medical school at the University of Tartu.

## Public Health Perspectives: Finland & Estonia

My project was an education abroad program that introduced global public health and discussed links between public health, educational, social, and economic development with emphasis on Finnish and Estonian societies. There was an on-campus class during the first week of May, and then I traveled to various locations in Finland/Estonia for a total of ten days.

**STEP**  
SECOND-YEAR TRANSFORMATIONAL  
EXPERIENCE PROGRAM

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This transformation is significant in my life because it helped me develop personally and relates to my professional goals. It was the first time I had been out of the country by myself, which made me feel extremely independent. Now, I am confident in my ability to navigate international landscape and am inspired to see other parts of the world. Seeing the medical school at the University of Tartu reinforced my desire to pursue the medical field, and I was fascinated by the both the healthcare and education systems in both Finland and Estonia. There has been so much controversy in recent years regarding healthcare in the United States, and I think we could learn a lot from other countries. In Finland and Estonia, everyone has access to healthcare regardless of income, which is fantastic! If the United States could implement a similar system, I think many of our problems could be alleviated.

Perhaps the most impactful and transformational day during my STEP Signature Project was the day my group visited Keuruu High School in Petäjävesi, Finland. This interaction was most transformational for me because I got to converse with the students there, and I learned so much from talking with them. They begin learning English at a young age, so by the time they get to high school, they are all fluent in both Finnish and English. With the Finnish education system, high school isn’t mandatory, so the students there actually enjoy going to school and learning. Also, it seemed like pretty much all of their learning is done in the classroom, so when they go home for the day, they aren’t bogged down with homework/extra assignments. I am very appreciative of the education I received in the U.S., but I feel like I was constantly tested to the point where I wasn’t actually learning the material. Oftentimes, I was just trying to memorize information to do well on the test. It did not seem like this was the case for the Finnish students I talked to.

This experience impacted me personally because it helped me mature as a young adult. I first learned as much as I could about these two countries before departure, and was then able to apply my knowledge in-country. I stepped outside of my comfort zone and did something I could have never imagined myself doing after my second year of college. I will cherish this experience for the rest of my life, and am eager to learn more about the world.

